Support to Production: A vital tenet for the MFDC

If the MFDC is to promote Production on an Industrial basis, it is vital that it starts establishing the primary bases that are *sine qua non* conditions to any form of local production: be those productions video documentaries, series, short films or big budget movies.

For too long now, production has simply been regarded as a matter of providing equipment and a certain amount of funding to anyone who had only the vaguest idea about making a film.

It has been considered that goodwill combined with a clever idea are enough to produce a viable product. Unfortunately, while such an attitude is an encouragement for amateurs, it ends with just that: an amateurish approach destined to produce a certain number of *films d'amateur* which neither have scope of distribution nor any value at any artistic or commercial level: even third-world film festivals. One would agree that this is no longer a viable approach to launch the MFDC as an industrial body.

So what solution do we propose?

Part of it begins with an approach that recognises all the prerequisites for professional production. These strategic areas of action include:

1. **Script Writing and Script Development**
2. **Project Development**
3. **Creation of a workforce of media professionals**
4. **Creation of Funding Policies sensitive to Realities of Production**
5. Accès à l'équipment

Script Writing and Script Development

THE SCRIPT: A BASIS FOR ANY AUDIOVISUAL PRODUCTION.

There is a saying that there are three secrets to a good film. First a good script, second a good script, third a good script. This is not an attempt at being clever. One key strategy that we should work on is script development for the following reasons:

1. The script determines the quality and coherence of a film.
2. The script is a vital tool to approach investors and sponsors.
3. The script is the first step where potential successes are separated from potential flops.
4. Solving problems on the script saves time and money during production
5. A good story is our only chance to get an audience.

If we are to speak of a film industry *per se*, we have to concentrate our strategy towards developing script. At the local level, it is our only chance to create a local audience. Let us not forget that our Mauritian audience has options. We need to give it a reason why it should watch a film produced locally when it could content itself with big-budget Hollywood and Bollywood films.

A script is also a key element to the Production Dossier. There are international organisations willing to invest money in films from the South, upon one condition: that there be an audience for that film. The script is the basis upon which projects are accepted or not.

It then seems logical that the script is the key area of action on which our strategies must converge.

We therefore recommend the following plans of action.

1. **The establishment of an interface involving the MBC where initial ideas can be selected by a panel for further script development.**
2. **The dedication of resources to ensure script development at the MFDC**
3. **The sourcing and harnessing of talented local writers into a script developing team that will ensure the rewriting of initial ideas to scripts of professional standard.**

These areas of action are a key to develop a viable film industry. Very few films produced locally are worthy of being distributed internationally or even locally. We need good stories to create a local audience just as we need them to feature in international festivals. We already have talented writers who have won international literary prizes, some of whom have even been approached by foreign film producers.

We have a duty to harness that talent for the benefit of the Mauritian Film Industry.

The choice is clear. Good films begin on paper, invest in people who can write good stories and the end product will be marketable.

Project Development

Project Development and compilation of Project Dossiers

Just as the script is important to the film at the level of quality good film making is also a business enterprise that comes with its administrative side. There is a whole sector that needs to be dedicated to what is called Project Development.

Film making relies on investment. How do we approach companies?

We need professional dossiers compiled by a specialist team who knows exactly what to include in the dossier. A department that can develop projects, do the required paperwork, estimate whether a budget has been well calculated, verify if a production schedule is well planned.

Project development is not guesswork. It is a document that has to sell an idea. International funding organisations have formats for such dossiers which need to be scrupulously respected. Indeed the project development stage will always determine whether a project will be sponsored or not.

In the light of this importance, we recommend the following strategies:

1. **Efforts should be put towards the creation a trained administrative staff, within the MFDC or elsewhere, experienced in handling production dossiers**
2. **The MFDC should be equipped to advise producers of steps to be taken in project development and preparation of dossiers.**

3. **The Department responsible for compiling dossiers should be in a position to help with producers obtaining required permissions and certificates relevant to their dossier.**
4. **We should be able to establish a format in which projects are developed and should be able to push the resulting dossiers to look for funding**

It will be quite obvious that a vital condition to be fulfilled is training. As mentioned, a dedicated staff needs to be created for this purpose. They should know all the processes involved within project development but should also be receptive to the particular conditions involved in each different project.

Creation of a workforce of media professionals

Our third area of action also needs immediate attention. The film industry is one that requires enormous manpower. More than that, it also requires highly specialised skills. This manpower cannot be employed on a permanent basis. Rather it needs to be provided with opportunities to undertake short contracts for specific projects.

Unfortunately, the audiovisual sector being a rather small in Mauritius, we have limited manpower spread out in a number of fields. Our objective is to network these professionals into a pool from which we can source labour for particular projects.

We can roughly the distribution of media professionals in Mauritius thus:

1. Television employees
2. Advertising Agencies (audiovisual)
3. Private Production Employees
4. Semi-professionals or Independents
5. Retired Professionals

Our great challenge remains to bring this sparse mass together. These people consist individuals involved directly in production: camera operators, technicians, producers, directors...and those indirectly involved in production: actors, set-designers, costume designers...

Added to this are a number of supporting services that are involved in production: caterers, drivers, helpers, etc...

This defines the strategies of MFDC and all its partners and stakeholders thus:

1. To engage in a headhunting policy that seeks out talented individuals working in media
2. Compiling and updating a directory of such individuals and service providers.
3. Create a network and create opportunities for this workforce to often work together.
4. To provide opportunity for these individuals to further train and expand their knowledge (e.g. attending workshops, working with foreign film and documentary crews.)
5. To assist these individuals to help on occasional independent projects even while they are employed.

It is important that the cooperation of all stakeholders be at play within this plan of action. Film and Audiovisual Production is a small field. More than most professionals will have permanent jobs that ensure their subsistence. For the film industry to develop such individuals should be given opportunities to do additional projects within their availability. Only with the sharing of experience within this workforce will we be able to create a skilled labour specialised in film.

This could eventually become an important selling point to attract foreign film crews considering filming in Mauritius.

Creation of Funding Policies sensitive to Realities of Production

Our final point of action is that of funding. There is a need in Mauritius to generate funding policies, more importantly funding policies that are suited to the realities of film production.

Here perhaps is the most delicate issue. One on which all stakeholders present in the venture of a film industry must cooperate on. Together, we need to create a financial environment that encourages individuals to start film projects, an environment that encourages private and public companies to invest in film projects. Finally, it is important that the State continues in providing support to film projects.

For indeed although, we have stated that there are foreign organisations willing to invest a lot of money in films from the south, these organisations often specify that a percentage of the budget is met locally for the participant.

Local investment is vital to projects. It is vital for them to obtain more sponsors. But it is also vital so it can create a self –sustained Mauritian Industry. Only then can we start thinking of a profit-making industry.

There are a number of solutions towards these such as tax shelters encouraging companies to invest specific sums over a defined number of years, reducing rates of interests on bank loans...

MFDC - L'obst. + les problèmes de fond les points présente

The strategy we recommend is that all stakeholders and willing partners work with the MFDC to find solutions towards the following goals:

1. **To financially assist the startup of film projects.**
2. **To encourage producers to take the chance of investing in projects that they believe in without the fear of being bankrupt.**
3. **To encourage local companies and organisations to invest money in film.**
4. **To guarantee that projects receive enough investment locally so to be eligible for further funding from foreign organisations.**

CRÉER DES UNITÉS:- qui soient équipés en matériel ~~et~~ standardisés.